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A Letter to the Young Men of the  
Society of Friends - 1840

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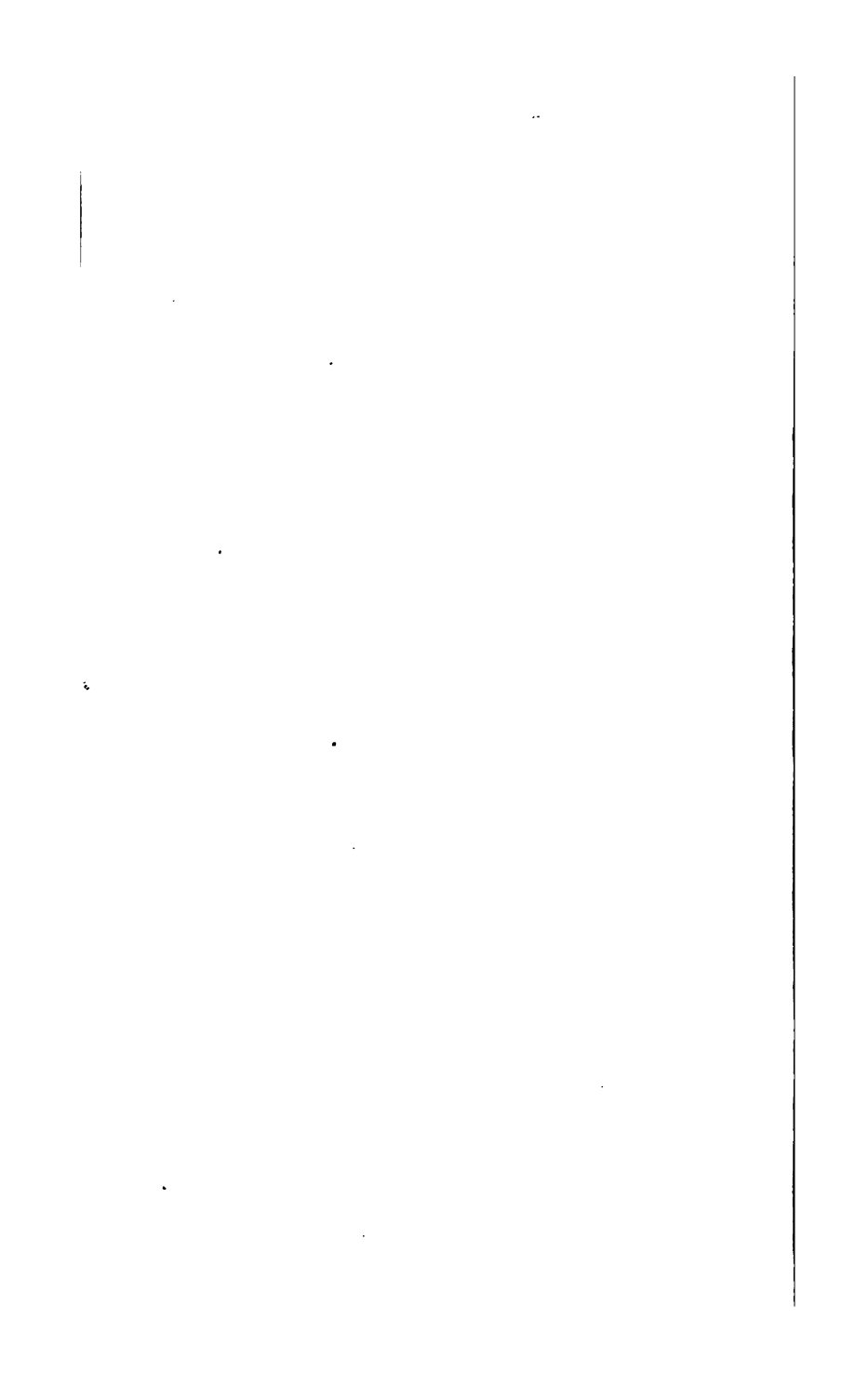
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A LETTER  
TO THE  
YOUNG MEN  
OF THE  
SOCIETY OF FRIENDS.

BY  
ONE OF THEMSELVES.

*Theodore Bampton*

"Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues  
of life."

LONDON:  
PUBLISHED BY HARVEY AND DARTON,  
GRACECHURCH-STREET.  
1840.

23. 1. 1914

*Alfred Hanson*

A LETTER

TO THE

YOUNG MEN

OF THE

SOCIETY OF FRIENDS.

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## A LETTER, &c.

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THE gathering together of the early Friends, and their separation from the great contending parties into which, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the declining church was divided, is an event in the history of that church well worthy the attention of every serious mind.

It was not for the sake of any new doctrine or opinion, the preaching of which might gratify their ambition, that these worthy men were separated from the world ; but they were persons who had retired from outward forms of worship to search the Scriptures, with prayer and fasting, and to seek that light, and that peace, which they could not find amidst the corrupt practices and conflicting opinions, which then distracted mankind.

It was “ after having observed *the light and unprofitable conversation and conduct of some, and the eagerness with which others were pursuing the riches of this world*, though both made a high profession of religion, that the mind of George Fox was deeply affected ; and, withdrawing from the company, he spent the greater part of the night alone, in prayer, mourning because of the

wickedness which abounded in the world. In this situation, the language was intelligibly addressed to his mind, 'Thou see'st how young people go together into vanity, and old people into the earth:—thou must forsake all, old and young, and be as a stranger unto all.'"

The religion of George Fox was not a dead outward form, nor was it a system of mere belief, in which the head only is concerned; but it was an internal, spiritual, living principle, affecting the heart and operating in the life. For it taught him "to act faithfully in two ways, viz., inwardly to God, and outwardly to man;" that his words "should be few and savoury, seasoned with grace;" and that he "should use the creatures in their service, as servants in their places, to the glory of Him who created them."

It taught him "that none were true Christians but such as were really born of God, and passed from death unto life; and that all others, however high their pretension to religion, were deceiving themselves." (Memoir, p. 7.)

"Not finding," continues the Memoir, "in his intercourse with different professors of religion, that comfort and settlement which he longed for, he continued to live in retirement; and when all hope of help from man was gone, and he had nothing outward to look to, he heard a voice, as in the secret of his soul, saying, 'There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition.' 'When I heard it,' he says, 'my heart did leap for joy. Then the Lord let me see why there was

none upon the earth that could speak to my condition, namely, that I might give Him all the glory. For all are concluded under sin, and shut up in unbelief, as I had been, that Jesus Christ might have the pre-eminence, who enlightens, and gives grace, faith and power. Thus when God doth work, who shall let it? This I know experimentally. My desires after the Lord grew stronger, and zeal in the pure knowledge of God and of Christ alone; without the help of any man, book, or writing. For though I read the Scriptures that spake of Christ and of God, yet I *knew* Him not but by revelation, as he who hath the key did open, and as the Father of life drew me to his Son by his Spirit. Then the Lord gently led me along, and let me see his love, which was endless and eternal, surpassing all the knowledge that men have in the natural state, or can get by history or books."

And again he says, "One day, when I had been walking solitary abroad, and was come home, I was taken up in the love of God, so that I could not but admire the greatness of his love; and while I was in that condition, it was opened unto me by the eternal light and power, and I therein clearly saw that *all was done*, and *to be done*, in *and by Christ*, and how he conquers and destroys this tempter, the devil, and all his works, and is a-top of him; and that all these troubles were good for me, and temptations for the trial of my faith, which Christ had given me. The Lord opened me that I saw through all these troubles and

temptations. My living faith was raised, that I saw all was done by Christ the life, and my belief was in him."

It is not my present purpose to examine the acts and writings of the founders of our religious Society, to enquire whether they were, or were not, free from error; or to consider the various constructions, whether fair or unfair, which have been, and may be, put upon them. I do not see that much practical good is likely to result from such an enquiry. They were doubtless subject to human infirmities; their labours partook of the imperfections inherent in all human productions, and in a time of fierce controversy and general fanaticism, it is not surprising, if the spirit of the age had its influence upon *them*, as it evidently had upon the first reformers.

But whatever might be the imperfection of knowledge, or the natural infirmities of those who first received the name of Quakers; when I consider the remarkable illumination of George Fox, and how far he was, in practical wisdom and Christian experience, beyond his fellows—when I reflect on the life and character of that extraordinary man, his influence over the minds of others, and how many he was the means of turning from evil to good, I cannot but ascribe this power over evil, and these good fruits, to that spirit which alone could have produced them: I cannot but believe that the light, which, in those days, broke through the clouds which had so long obscured the heavens, was no other than the breaking forth of that

glorious day when *the Tabernacle of God shall be with men*; the rising beam of that SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, whose light will shine more and more unto the *perfect day*.

And when I further reflect on the gradual formation and establishment of the Society of Friends as a separate division of the Christian church, and the providential manner in which it was preserved through every kind of oppression, calumny, and persecution; and consider that its separation from the rest of the world was not for the sake of worldly power, ambition, or self-righteousness, but for the cause of *virtue* and *piety*; that it has exerted a very salutary and a very powerful influence on mankind, in restraining that laxity of morals, which, without amounting to open vice, operates very injuriously upon the conscience; that it has set an example of purity and consistency of life, steadily upholding its testimonies against war, and oaths, and patiently bearing the penalties of the laws of men against keeping the commandment of God, "swear not *at all*;" that it has conscientiously refused to countenance a "hireling ministry," seeing, and *feeling* in its own sufferings, the grievous abuses and profanations which have arisen out of the system of a *hired* clergy; that it has been the steady advocate of civil and religious liberty; that it has pleaded the cause of the oppressed and enslaved, visited the widow and the fatherless in their affliction, fed the hungry, clothed the naked, proved itself in all things the follower of HIM who said, "Ye

are my *friends* if ye do whatsoever I command you :”—when I reflect on these things, and remember that there is but one source of every good and perfect gift ; and that not a sparrow falls to the ground without our Heavenly Father’s knowledge, I cannot but believe that it has been of the divine providence of the Almighty ruler of men, that the Society of Friends has been preserved amongst the numberless sects into which, by the natural variety in the constitution of the human mind, and the diversity of circumstances under which it is placed, the Christian church is divided, as an example of the simplicity and spirituality of the Christian religion ; and I cannot but desire that, without despising other communities, or judging others’ opinions, avoiding that party, sectarian spirit, which, under the garb of zeal and benevolence, seeks the gratification of self-love and vanity, we may, in the spirit of an enlightened philanthropy, uphold our high standard before the world, that others, seeing our good works, may glorify *our Father* who is in Heaven.

What, therefore, I wish to press upon your most serious consideration is this : are *we*, the YOUNG MEN of the Society of Friends, as individuals, and as the future heads of the Society, endeavouring, by our lives and conversations, to adorn and recommend the simple religion of our forefathers ? to uphold, not in mere profession, but in practical experience, that true worship of God, which the Saviour taught at Jacob’s well, when he said to the woman of Samaria, “ The hour cometh, and

now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth?" Are we endeavouring to uphold the high standard of morality which has been the honourable distinction of our religious Society? Alas! I fear we must acknowledge, that, instead of being the strength of the community, we are rather its weakness. I have long lamented, for myself and for us all, that we, as an influential and highly important portion of the Society of Friends, and of the church at large, whether regarded with reference to the present, or to a future period, profit so little by the talents entrusted to our care, make so little good use of the advantages we enjoy, set so poor an example to each other and to our juniors, exhibit so unfavourable a picture of the beauty of Christianity, recommend so little the religion of our worthy predecessors.

But if it be indeed true, that we have been preserved as a religious society, as an example of a Christian church in its greatest simplicity; if we have, individually or collectively, been favoured with a greater degree of light than has been received by mankind in general, are we not called upon for so much the greater circumspection in our lives and conversations, that we may not bring a scandal upon our profession; and seeing that "not the *hearers* of the law are just before God, but the *doers* of the law shall be justified." If,

by birth and education, we are set free from the forms and contrivances with which human infirmity has encumbered religion, and if our minds are unfettered by the creeds with which cupidity and the lust of domination have sought to enslave the consciences of men, ought we not to prize our high privilege, and not lightly "turn again to the weak and beggarly elements," or "desire to be again in bondage?" (Gal. iv. 9.)

And ought not *we*, of the rising generation, in an especial manner, to consider the solemn and affecting fact, that in a few short years, if we be not summoned to another world, we shall be called upon to fill the posts left vacant by our fathers, and to bear the standard of our Lord and master to a future generation?

It is in our power to exert a material influence over the present, as well as the future state of the church.

The influence which young men possess over each other is very great,—far greater than is generally supposed: over their juniors, and especially their *younger brothers*, as they rise into manhood, it is immense. In early life the mind is most susceptible of impressions, most easily biassed towards evil or good; and at that critical period of life when the boy begins to think himself a man, his future character depends, in a very important degree, on the associates he forms, and especially on the example of his elder brothers. If in them the excellence of religion is displayed, it will not be without its effect. If (as is often

the case) their zeal for religion renders it irksome, it may be rejected for a time; but the *virtues* of a brother will one day be remembered, and will be seen shining through all his defects. When elder brothers possess that wisdom and patience, hardly to be expected in early life, which will bear with the refractory, and contentedly wait for the divine guidance and assistance, and the gradual effect of a steady example, then the younger branches are, indeed, highly favoured. But where, on the other hand, religion is either shunned as something gloomy, or derided from sheer folly, by the young men of a family, the junior members are much to be felt for. It is not probable that they will be wiser than their seniors, that they will esteem what their brothers deride, or that they will have fortitude and *humility* to bear that cruel martyrdom, the ridicule of those to whom they naturally look up and whose manhood they emulate. The example of the best of parents has thus been often rendered unavailing.

How interesting and how highly important is this consideration! How great the responsibility it entails upon young men! Are we not therefore bound by every tie of duty and charity, so to regulate our hearts and conversations as to offer no impediment to the progress of our fellow-creatures? Are we not bound, by the noblest motives, to combat our own evil propensities, and to check, by our example, and by every means which may be placed in our way, those of others? Are we not bound to labour patiently and humbly,

that the kingdom of the Redeemer may be established in our own hearts, and that it may spread in the world?

Far be it from me to cast a shade over innocent mirth; "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine!" It is not the object, nor can it be the effect of true religion to interfere with the harmless recreations and gratifications of this life, but rather to purify, and, by purifying, to multiply and perfect them. For religion is the reuniting of man to the only source of every blessing; and if it be ever attended with sorrow, it is only the unavoidable pain, which accompanies the separation of the good from the evil—the refining process which divides the silver from the dross. Nor would I harshly judge the playful chat, which may amuse without injuring, and which is perhaps as improving as the ordinary *small-talk* of the morning call, or the tea-table; but it is to be feared there are comparatively few young men whose consciences will acquit them of every thing more criminal than mere levity of conversation in their intercourse together.

If it be a sin to squander the time given us for improvement, in foolish or vicious conversation, to neglect the opportunities afforded us of doing good, and to foster the evils which already exist, what shall we say of the conduct of those, who to gratify their own corrupt propensities, scruple not to tamper with the passions and weaknesses of yet uncontaminated youth? What shall we, say of those who, without shame or remorse, in-

stil the pollutions they have imbibed at school, into the minds of guileless boyhood?—from whose evil influence even the soul of a younger brother is not sacred? who not only glory in their own degradation, but teach those to whom they ought to be examples, to think it manly thus to debase a nature designed to bear the image of God? What shall we say of those who thus deliberately undermine the happiness of their fellow-creatures, rob them of their peace, and sow the seeds of spiritual disease and misery?

Surely if to inflict a bodily injury upon our neighbour, to rob him of his earthly possessions, or to destroy his natural life, be a crime,—much more so is it to inflict upon him a *spiritual* injury, to rob him of his *spiritual* treasures, or to destroy the life of his *immortal soul*?

If we would only consider the extensive and complicated mischiefs propagated by licentious conversation, the deep, perhaps irreparable injuries inflicted on our fellow-creatures by appealing to the natural corruptions of the human heart, surely the common feeling of honour and generosity would check the unbridled latitude of speech too general in companies of young men. How much more satisfactory would it be in the hour of calm reflection, when memory recalls the time which is past, could it bring with it the sacred feeling of gratitude to the Parent of every good thought and affection, that it had not been spent in vain; that if no positive benefit had been conferred upon ourselves or others, we had at least

been kept from evil! How enviable the feelings of that young man who could look back to the social party, with the sweet reflection that he had been the means of restraining evil, and of uniting improvement with pleasure! Happy is he who can *thus* revert to days that are past, and rejoice in the retrospect of by-gone pleasures.

- There is nothing so lovely, nothing so truly admirable, as a life of piety in youth. True wisdom is the ornament of old age; but to see wisdom and talents dedicated to God in the early vigour of life; to see the mental powers of a young man directed to the noble pursuit of virtue and truth, must be indeed well-pleasing in the sight of God and the holy angels. And there are young men in our Society, happy am I in its acknowledgment, whose unexceptionable lives show forth the true dignity of the Christian, and in whose meek and lowly minds the spirit of Jesus Christ shines with a lustre superior far to all the arguments of the theologian, and very different in its effects from the wrangling controversies, which but too often originate in the love of one's own opinion, and seldom end in any practical good.

But these, I fear, are the exceptions. Collectively we must in candour confess, that we add but little by our virtue, to the spiritual strength of the church of Christ, and are more ready to disparage, in our conversation, the discipline and doctrines of our own Society, than to maintain them. It is indeed remarked by others, that the young

members of the Society of Friends are the only class of professing Christians who ridicule and speak ill of their own profession! Surely this is no honourable distinction. Let us consider in what it originates.

The source of the mischief is a want of humility; for a mind sensible of its own helplessness and submissive to the divine will, would seek, in that will, to reform the evils it sees, rather than to spread them abroad. The usual subjects of ridicule and scandal are not, however, the great principles of the Society of Friends, (of which the young men too generally know but little,) but those external peculiarities, which (whether founded in wisdom or not) displease the natural vanity so universal in early manhood. Those who judge by the appearance often ridicule conduct, the motive and origin of which they have not taken the pains to consider; but the reflective mind, if it smile at the undue stress often laid upon non-essentials, will look a little below the surface, and calmly consider in what the peculiarities of Friends, in dress and address, originate. The early Friends recommended *plainness of dress*, and discountenanced useless ornaments, and every thing tending to foster vanity, and to occupy the time and attention which might be usefully employed. They do not appear to have differed in general appearance from others, until others differed from them; and as they justly regarded the ever-changing fashions of the world, as the fruits and evidences of vanity and folly, they did not

conform to them, but retained the mode of dress to which they had been accustomed, and although they have not in this, or in many other more important things, stood unmoved before the current of time, they are now distinguished, more or less, by their old-fashioned clothing ; an evidence that, although each rising generation has given way a little to the world, they have not entirely conformed to it in *this* respect. Now, what absurdity is there in an individual continuing to dress as he has been accustomed, and as his father did before him? and what absurdity is there in a community of individuals dressing as they have always dressed? Is it not rather a mark of wisdom than of folly, to abstain from change for the mere love of change or of fashion, when there is nothing to be gained in point of comfort or convenience? It is to be regretted that so much is said at our meetings on this subject, as if it were a principle of that simple Christianity which George Fox and his friends proclaimed, to wear a peculiar garb. At the same time it ought to be considered, that when young persons are observed to depart from the habits of the Society in their dress, it is natural and not unfair to attribute such appearance to *vanity*, and to regard the external conformity to the world, which may be observed in our meetings, to a corresponding conformity of mind, a circumstance surely calculated to excite painful reflections, and well deserving of serious comment.

The peculiar dress of Friends is thought to have

a salutary effect in restraining the young from gay company and places of diversion. I am not disposed to question the soundness of this view; for, although it could be wished that evils were avoided from religious principle, and thus really abandoned, yet we have need of every preservative; and it may be better for us to be restrained from open vice, even by force, than to become familiar with it. It should, however, be remembered, that God searcheth the *heart*, and external morality without internal sanctification will not fit us for the purity of a heavenly state of existence.

Another peculiarity of our Society respects what is called "plainness of speech and behaviour." The early Friends did not comply with the ceremonies and compliments which, in those days, were much thought of, believing that their external conduct and appearance ought to correspond with the meekness, simplicity, and sincerity of the religion they professed. They wished, as far as they were enabled, to hold up a standard of perfect Christianity, to be a personification of those pure principles which our Saviour inculcated, that the operation of the Holy Spirit might descend to every action of their lives, and their conduct being thus governed in all things, even the most minute, by the Word of God, their light might so shine before men, that they, seeing their good works might glorify their Father who is in heaven. To preserve unsullied the purity of this standard, they rejected the innovations in

*language* which vanity had made, and returned to the correct (and more convenient) rule of using the singular number when one person is addressed. They also styled the months and days numerically, instead of using the heathen appellations, which originated in gross idolatry, and ought to be forgotten; and they thus avoided the absurdity of continuing names of the months no longer applicable to the altered calendar. How rational, and how beautiful this care of the external *neatness* and *finish* of the structure they were building! What is there in it to ridicule, or to diminish our respect for the venerable and excellent men whose lives were consistent in all things with the dictates of charity, and with the beautiful system of discipline they gradually established?

Another subject of much mischievous conversation is found in the failings, whether real or supposed, of individual members of the Society, whose conduct is often judged without enquiry or charity, and made the ground of complaint against the religious community to which they belong. It is but too often the case that the very persons who are most ready to lay hold of the errors and failings they observe, to disparage the Society of Friends, are the most offended when their own conduct is enquired into, and whilst complaining on the one hand that the discipline of the Society is not enforced, are ready to quit it altogether if it intrude into their own household! This is one principal ground of offence with the young mem-

bers of our community. Every step taken with a view to its improvement is made a subject of complaint. A friendly visit made for the purpose of enquiry is deemed *inquisitorial*;—a visit of gospel love is considered intrusive, and the *overseer* who should have the misfortune to oversee any misconduct, and fulfil his duty in relation to it, may expect his character to be made into mincemeat for the entertainment of his flock.

It is natural to dislike that which disagrees with our natural propensities. Few young people are wise enough to relish reproof; and by unmanly prejudice, thus engendered, the conduct of individuals is but too often judged, and misrepresented accordingly. These prejudices are greedily fed upon the failings and infirmities of those who never thought themselves perfect, or imagined others thought them so. It is doubtless lawful to judge of the goodness or badness of actions, considered in themselves; but it is not lawful to judge the internal state and character of individuals, or how they may be regarded by the Omniscient Judge of all; neither, therefore, is it lawful to harbour hatred in our own hearts, or to instil it into the hearts of others; because we do not, and cannot know, whether the external evils we see, or fancy we see, arise from internal wickedness, or are the result of hereditary corruption and evil education. Still more offensive must it be to an infinitely merciful and compassionate God, to glory in the shame of others, and to make the failings of solitary individuals a stumbling-block and an

offence, and an argument against the principles of a whole religious community. Can it be otherwise than painful to an ingenuous mind to see the rising generation, the young men who ought to be the active strength of the body, as they are shortly to be its deliberative wisdom, publishing abroad its weaknesses, magnifying its blemishes, and glorying in its decay? Let us not judge according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment. Let us not reject reproof because the reprover may not be free from imperfection; nor suppose that, in extending a helping hand to us, he is insensible of his own need of assistance. Above all let us not seek to defame our Society, or to publish its delinquencies, but rather let it be our aim so to govern our own minds and lives as to effect its reformation. If evils abound, should the love of many wax cold? Is it the part of a wise and good man to withdraw from a society, because many of its members do not act up to its principles? Rather should not this be an additional inducement to a generous mind, and to a Christian, to uphold by his example the standard of purity, so shamefully trodden on?

It is the privilege of the members of the Society of Friends to be permitted to worship God without the intervention of forms and ceremonies, and to draw pure water from the living fountain, unadulterated by human errors. Our minds are not fettered by creeds and confessions of faith. We are not bound to think on all subjects precisely alike; but so long as we acknowledge the

Lord Jesus Christ, and keep his commandments, we may worship our Creator in spirit and in truth, gain wisdom and knowledge without restriction, and retain the advantages of our excellent institutions. These are unspeakably great blessings; would that we appreciated them more justly, and cherished them more gratefully!

The diversities of opinion in the Christian church, and the different sects arising out of it, will probably always exist, owing to the varied constitution of the minds of men, some being more affected by one truth, others by another, as the light of the sun in the world of nature is divided into rays, and variously received by different objects. It is not the part of a Christian to love others less for entertaining sentiments differing from his own; for the life and power of religion may be found hidden beneath many errors; and while, on the one hand, with the soundest doctrine and the most perfect discipline, the one thing needful may be wanting, we may find, on the other, that true Christianity may exist, even amongst all the devices and encumbrances of men. "These things," says the pious Dr. More, "are none of them bad enough to make men bad, and I am sure none of them are good enough to make them good."

If we meet with obstacles in our religious course, or hear sentiments preached in which we cannot unite, let us patiently bear the cross, and endeavour in charity and meekness to avail ourselves

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of all proper occasions to extirpate error, by diffusing a knowledge of the truth. If we meet with darkness, we should do but little good in proving it to be dark, while we neglect the obvious means of expelling the darkness, by bringing a light ! “ Let your light, therefore, so shine before men, that they, seeing your *good works*, may glorify your Father who is in heaven.” How mistaken are they who suppose they are serving God and extending his kingdom, by spreading abroad the report of errors they see, or imagine they see, in others, while their own hearts and lives evince little or none of that spirit of love and charity, which is the very soul of true faith !

While, therefore, we preserve that simplicity of worship, and that excellent system of discipline which distinguish us as a religious community ; and while we maintain that pure morality which characterized the Society in its early days, upholding the testimonies of our forefathers against the vain customs of the world, and the grievous corruptions which have desolated the visible church, let us never forget that the true church does not consist in, or rest upon, external organization, but is established, by the reception of the Truth, in the hearts of its individual members. Establish this spiritual church, and the visible church is secure. Reform the hearts of men, and their lives will be amended. Appeal to the internal principles of action, and the outward manifestation of those principles will be correspondingly affected. The

*form of godliness*, united to *its power* is beautiful indeed: without it how much doth the visible church resemble a *whited sepulchre* !

The great truth on which the church is founded, is that which Peter acknowledged, in reply to the Lord's question, "Whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say unto thee, that thou art Peter; and *upon this rock will I build my church*, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matt. xvi. 15—18.)

The church, then, is formed by the reception, or acknowledgment, of this fundamental truth. But what does this reception or acknowledgment imply,—not a mere belief in the historical fact of Jesus being the Anointed, the Messiah; but an *internal evidence or recognition* that *JESUS is the Christ, the SON of the living God*, a living faith which sees and perceives that in Jesus Christ dwelleth *all the fullness of the Godhead bodily*, and which feeds upon him as the *bread of life*, eating his *flesh* and drinking his *blood*. ("As the living Father hath sent me and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.")

Faith is an internal acknowledgment or reception of TRUTH. The human mind possesses this receptive power, which is essential to its spiritual

life, and although it is seldom so free from evils innate and acquired, and from prejudices of education, as to receive the truth unmixed with error ; yet as it submits to the operation of the " Spirit of truth," it is led from one truth to another, until it is brought " into all truth." (John, xvi. 13.)

It is not sufficient to believe simply on the authority of another, or to consider a doctrine true because others think it so. Many things which are highly esteemed amongst men are abomination in the sight of God ; and we have abundant evidence of the melancholy consequences of this blind dependence upon human authority, in the corruptions which have desolated the church, both under the Mosaic and Christian dispensations, " making the Word of God of none effect through the traditions of men."

Many of the Samaritans believed on Jesus, " for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all things that ever I did." But when they were *come to him*, in obedience to her request ; and when he *abode with them*, " many more believed because of his own word ; and said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying, for we have heard him ourselves, and *know* that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."

This is the true practical knowledge of the Lord, which can only be attained by our *coming unto him*, and by his *abiding with us*.

The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him,

neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things," (1 Cor. ii. 14, 15.) These things cannot be comprehended by the natural faculties of the mind, unassisted by spiritual light; yet it is necessary for them to be understood, and *seen* to be true, otherwise they have no stability. "When any one heareth the word of the kingdom and *understandeth it not*, then cometh the wicked one and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way-side." (Matt. xiii. 19; Luke, viii. 12.)

The true course of the Christian, therefore, is to shun those evils which darken his understanding, and cast a veil of obscurity over heavenly things, to divest his mind of prejudice, and of dependence upon human authority and tradition, and to *search the Scriptures* with a *humble, teachable* disposition, praying for the light of the Holy Spirit to open the sacred contents of the written book, and seeking the knowledge of the Divine will, not for the sake of merely knowing, but of *doing* it; seeing that he that knoweth his Lord's will and doeth it not, so far from being a wise man, is the veriest fool. As we are thus faithful to the degree of light we possess, more will be given us; and this as a necessary consequence; for as the mind is purified and exalted by receiving and obeying the Word of God, the obstacles which before obstructed its vision are proportionally removed. It is of the Divine Providence that man is preserved from receiving a greater degree of spiritual

knowledge in his understanding, than his heart is willing rightly to employ ; for although we find evil men possessing much Scripture lore, yet, with them, truth is merely superficial and not really and *spiritually discerned*. The Bible will lead no man astray who reads it for the purpose of growing in purity and spirituality. The way-faring man, though a fool, will not err therein ; and it is very admirable how the simple-minded pass over difficulties on which the wise of this world stumble, and how they find the true way of salvation, without being blinded by the learned dust, or bewildered in the interminable mazes of the field of controversy. "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after *righteousness*, for they shall be filled."

The power of true faith is *infinite*, because it is not of man but of God. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also : and greater works than these shall he do ; because I go to the Father." Man does the works of Christ, not of himself, but by the Spirit of Christ which is in him. Yet he is not a mere passive instrument, but an active one ; for *he* does the works, by the power given him. The *wise man* builds his house upon the *rock*, and the *foolish man* upon the *sand*, which proves that man is a free agent, and that he works as of himself ; for though his power of acting is continually derived from God, he has also the choice of applying that power, for it is evident that God would not build for him a house *upon the sand*.

Hence we may see the reason why evils are permitted, and why all men are not saved, that is, made holy and happy; it is because God, though Omnipotent, cannot act contrary to the laws which his own omniscient wisdom has ordained for the good of his creatures, and which are, therefore, like himself, immutable. It is because to deprive man of his voluntary power would be to deprive him of his humanity, and of his only means of entering into heaven. God has no pleasure in wickedness: he desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live; but to deprive him of his liberty, would be to take away his power of turning from his wickedness. There is no joy in constraint: it is only when the heart takes delight in serving God, that his service is found to be freedom; that his yoke is indeed easy, and his burden light. I know of no passage of Scripture where this doctrine of the co-operation of man with the power of God, is so clearly and beautifully pointed out, as in the ninetyeth Psalm, "*Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us; and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.*" (ver. 16, 17.) It is also said in the Levitical law, (cap. xxii. 29,) "When ye will offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving unto the LORD, offer it *at your own will.* But whatsoever *hath a blemish*, that shall ye not offer; for it shall not be acceptable for you," (ver. 20.) Neither from a

stranger's hand shall ye offer the bread of your God of any of these; because their corruption is in them," (ver. 25.)

We must remember that this law is still in force as to its true signification; for it is (like all the words of God) "*spirit and truth*," (John, vi. 63,) and our Lord expressly declared, "I am not come to destroy, (the law or the prophets,) but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, *one jot or one tittle* shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled," (Matt. v. 17, 18,) and, that to *fulfil* did not mean to *abolish* is plain from the context; for it is said, "Whosoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven," (ver. 19.)

We are required to dedicate our affections and talents to the Lord, *of our own free-will*, and in all the health and vigour of our lives, "while the evil days come not, in which we shall say, I have no pleasure in them." The *lame* and *maimed* and the *blemished* will not be accepted of God.

Let me therefore entreat you, as you value your present and future happiness, as you hope to live in peace on earth, and to gain admission to those heavenly mansions wherein nothing impure can by any means dwell, to *shun that great heresy, which has been the cause of the decline of the church in all periods of its decay; namely, the separation of faith and charity.*

*Faith* without *charity*, like the body without the spirit, is dead and useless. *Charity* without

*faith* is merely natural and not spiritual; and *good works*, without *faith and charity*, are only the *forms* of godliness, without its *power*. A man may be kind and generous from natural affection: he may be just in his outward dealings from pride or policy: he may abstain from gross evils for the sake of his health and reputation; he may keep the commandments as to his outward actions, while he breaks them all spiritually: he may be a *moral* man, in the ordinary sense of the word, and yet be very far from the kingdom of heaven.

All our righteousness is but filthy rags, and will never gain us admission to the marriage supper of the Lamb. We must be *born of the spirit*, and made *new creatures*. Old things must be passed away, and all things be made new; and “*all things of God*, who hath reconciled us unto himself by Jesus Christ: to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing our trespasses unto us.” (2 Cor. v. 17—19.)

As we thus become *spiritually minded*, and *born again*, things which, before, were enveloped in mystery and darkness, become plain and evident, even as in the light of the noon-day sun; and the Christian, as he progresses in his heavenward course, following the GOOD SHEPHERD in the regeneration, abiding in his love, by keeping his commandments, (John, xv. 10, &c.,) and looking unto him as the way, the truth, and the life, finds that “the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” (Prov. iv. 18.) The things which are hid

from the wise and prudent, are thus gradually revealed to the spiritual babe; and, though in this state of existence, he must always see as "through a glass, darkly," yet the nearer he approaches that kingdom where all is light and durable reality, the more he sees of "the mystery of the kingdom of God," (Mark, iv. 11,) the more he marvels at the stupendous wonders of creation, redemption, and sanctification; the more he adores the goodness, the wisdom and the power which called him into being, and supplies his every want, with miracles day by day, and which, if he be only willing and obedient, (Isa. i. 19,) will never fail him nor forsake him, but will assuredly lead him to the mansions of the blessed, and give him a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

The mind of man in its fallen state is entirely subverted, so that it sees only outward things, or the objects which affect the outward senses, and are tangible to the material organs. These it regards as real and substantial: spiritual things as comparatively unreal and unsubstantial. But as it is gradually restored to order, by being "born of the Spirit," and made "a new creature," it sees things no longer "according to the appearance," but as they really are; and it perceives by a light far clearer than the light of this world, that *spiritual* things are the only real and substantial things, having power and durable existence, while that which we call *matter*, is continually changing, and forming into new masses. The material body of man, in itself, is dead and motionless, being

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merely the covering of the spirit, who is the real man, receiving life and power from the great I AM, the *self-existent* Jehovah. "God is a spirit," and surely if there be anything *real* and *substantial*, the SOURCE and CREATOR of all must be so; yet the natural man regards even the LORD JEHOVAH more as an *abstract principle*, than a BEING whom he can love, worship, and supplicate; a tender parent who ever desires his welfare, and continually leads him to Himself as the only source of joy and immortality.

The carnal mind being at enmity with God, regards him as a God of *vengeance*, and forgets that he is LOVE itself, the same to-day, yesterday, and for ever, without variableness or the shadow of turning. It regards *death* as something gloomy, as the termination of its joys, instead of their commencement, and cannot perceive that the present state of existence is merely temporal, and preparatory to an eternal and *true* life; and consistent with its carnal ideas of all spiritual things, are its views of the "*kingdom of God*," *his church* and *worship*.

"But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak." (Heb. vi. 9.) You have been taught and educated in the Divine truths, that "the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke, xvii. 21.) That the church is built, by living faith, on the Rock of Ages, the LORD JESUS CHRIST, (Matt. xvi. 18,) that "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth." (John, iv. 24.) You have been

taught that true *baptism* is "not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God, (1 Peter, iii. 21;) and that the true *supper of the Lord* is not, and never was intended to be, administered by a priest at stated times and seasons, but is provided by the Lord himself, according to his own promise; "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." (Rev. iii. 20.) In fine, you have been taught that religion is an individual work, and that "except a man be born again he *cannot* enter the kingdom of God."

Let us, therefore, cherish these blessed truths; let us be faithful to the light which is bestowed upon us, and "walk while we have the light, lest darkness come upon us," and we know not whither we go. (John, xii. 35.) Let us "search the Scriptures" with increasing diligence, seeking for the light of that Divine Word, which is at once their source and their substance,\* and remembering the declaration of our Lord and Saviour, who is the WORD and the TRUTH itself, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." (John, vi. 63.)

But seeing that "not every one that saith, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of the Father who

\* See Matt. vii. 9—13. Compare John, xii. 48—50 with chap. v. 39 and 45; Luke, xxiv. 27.

is in heaven," let us be like the wise man, "who built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation upon a rock, and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house and could not shake it, for it was founded upon a rock." (Luke, vi. 48.) Let us lay our foundation upon the ROCK OF AGES, and, in the devout acknowledgment that, "unless the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it," pray that the Lord will "establish the work of our hands upon us," and thus build that *true spiritual church*, against which even the gates of hell shall never prevail.

I have not dilated upon particular points of morals, deeming it safer to appeal to the internal principles of action, than to prescribe rules for external conduct: and being persuaded that when the two *great commandments*, love to God, and love to man, are duly estimated in the heart of the Christian, his whole life will be governed by a much better power and rule, than any mere moral code could contain. I would, however, say a few words on one or two subjects which particularly concern us, the *young men* of the Society of Friends.

We live in times of considerable excitement, both in the moral and religious world. The spirit of enquiry, kindled at the Protestant Reformation, has made rapid strides of late. Men are no longer satisfied to take things as their forefathers left them; or to act upon the maxim, that what did for the last generation will do for the present.

There is an universal desire for *reform* ; a demand for such changes in the laws of the country as shall be adapted to the altered state of society and the enormous increase of population. Hence *politics* form the subject of general conversation, and, (as might be expected,) *party spirit* too often prevails over the spirit of charity and liberty. Now, while I would encourage the disposition to bear our part, as opportunities offer, in promoting the good of our fellow-creatures, whether temporally or spiritually, individually or as a nation, I would earnestly entreat you to guard against that party-spirit which originates in selfishness and narrow-minded prejudice, and is the fruitful source of evil to yourselves, and of disorder and mischief to the community. I would entreat you to follow the bright example of the early Friends, whose loyalty, peacefulness, and perseveranec, have obtained for us, their unworthy successors, so many advantages. To excite the passions of ignorant men, to engender or encourage idleness and discontent, to aid in producing disorder and anarchy, are crimes offensive in the sight of God and man ; and to obstruct the progress of improvement, to keep the blessings of knowledge and liberty from our fellow-creatures, and wilfully to deprive them of advantages they might otherwise enjoy, are crimes almost as hateful. It is the solemn duty of every man to seek the public weal, —the welfare of the community. It is the solemn duty of every man to be loyal, contented, and diligent in that station which Providence has

assigned him, and faithful in the use of those political rights to which, as a citizen or a subject, he is entitled.

In the religious world, also, much ill feeling and contention exist. I would have every one ready "to give a reason for the hope that is in him;" nor can there be a more interesting or edifying subject of conversation than the contents of those sacred and beautiful volumes, the book of Revelation and the book of Nature. Conducted in sincerity, humility, and charity, such enquiries can only be profitable and delightful: alas! for the depravity of the human heart, that they should ever give rise to anger! that we should love each other less, because we do not all attain to the same degree of knowledge! Let us guard against that pride, which, under the garb of humility, would set limits to the progress of another, and say, "Thus far shalt thou go, and no further." If knowledge be sought for the sake of *use*, and not for the gratification of idle curiosity, vanity, or self-love, there need be no limit to its pursuit. We can never know too much: is it *humility*, or *pride* which fancies we can? But let us, on the other hand, be sedulously careful, that we do not *profane* holy things, by seeking with that which is natural and sensual, to find out that which is spiritual and divine. Let us in all our researches, in our reading, our observation, our conversation, endeavour to keep our minds under the influence of the Spirit of Truth, and to seek for the TRUTH, and not for the confirmation of preconceived

opinions. We may "wrest" the letter of Scripture to confirm almost any doctrine; but let us diligently search *the whole contents*, in conjunction with the book of *nature*, especially appealing to that grand expositor, *Experience*. If we regard ourselves as children *seeking* for the truth, we shall be less apt to despise those who differ from us in religious belief: self-righteousness is but too often the origin of controversy, and of intolerance.

The pursuit of *wealth*, the various *pleasures* and *amusements* of this life, I would leave to the consciences of individuals. Competence is an object all may lawfully seek. The possession of great wealth is not inconsistent with Christianity; for a man, rich in worldly treasures, may use them for the good of his fellow-creatures, and be truly "poor in spirit."

The recreations of this life, so long as they are not immoral in their nature or tendency, may be safely enjoyed; for religion will never restrict our happiness, but give durability and reality to all our joys. Let us rejoice evermore, and in every thing *give thanks*; and by thus referring the blessings we enjoy, to their Divine Source, we shall find them no longer the mere gratifications of the moment, but the means of permanent happiness, by increasing our sense of the goodness and providence of our Heavenly Father.

Besides the happiness which religion sheds over the lawful and necessary occupations which are appointed for our good, and without which our

minds, unable to bear constant elevation to spiritual things, would be apt to go astray, and over the recreation necessary for the health both of body and of mind; a religious life possesses *secular* advantages which deserve mention. In business the value of a good moral character is too well known to require comment; but besides this, the influence which a purified and exalted mind possesses over the minds of others, is often experienced in secular things as well as in spiritual, and is a fact of no small importance. If all were governed by true charity, there would be no miseries to lament; and in proportion as the causes of evils are removed, the evils themselves will cease. Hence, to diffuse true Christian principles, to extend the kingdom of the Redeemer, is the only effectual means of securing temporal as well as spiritual blessings.

Then again, a well-regulated mind possesses far greater power in all its faculties, as well as greater power in applying them, than can be acquired by one, disordered, and blinded by selfishness and prejudice. It possesses a clearness of vision, a soundness of judgment, and a facility of seeing and taking advantage of the opportunities of usefulness which may be opened to it.

These considerations are well worthy of attention; and though I would never urge them as any *inducement* to a religious life, for that can only be a life sincerely dedicated to God, yet they should not be disregarded, especially by young men in their pursuit of those temporal

things which are necessary for this life, and which, I doubt not, will be abundantly provided for all who seek them aright, and who remember the Lord's gracious promises, "There is no man who hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come, life everlasting." But, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

There is one more subject, which I feel bound briefly to allude to, before closing this long, and I fear, tedious epistle. The fatal error of delaying the work of repentance, on the supposition, that as life draws to a close, it will lose its charms, and the work will be so much easier, has been so frequently brought under review, that any further remarks may appear stale and superfluous. Nevertheless, though we have had "line upon line," and "precept upon precept," the evil still exists, and will probably ever exist, so long as repentance is regarded as a sudden and instantaneous work. While it is imagined that the misery arising as the necessary consequence of disobedience to those divine precepts, which are only ordained because essential to our happiness, constitutes repentance, it is not likely that any exhortation will have much effect. But let it be borne in mind, that true repentance is nothing less than a *change of heart*, (literally a *turning of the mind*,) a real *hatred* and *abandonment* of the natural

evils of the heart, and a steady purpose to "cease to do evil, and learn to do well."

Now, when it is considered that this change of heart is a gradual work, that every man must, at some time or other, pass through the wilderness, before he can reach the promised land, (see Exodus, and 1 Cor. x. 6, 11, &c.,) and that the river Jordan, in which was performed the outward symbol of the "baptism of repentance," lies between the wilderness and the promised land, it will be seen that there are many reasons for setting out betimes on our journey. It may be objected, that the labourers who had worked but one hour, received as much as they who had borne the burthen and heat of the day. But let us bear in mind the circumstance, that these labourers had not *rejected* the call of the householder; they had been *waiting* to be hired, and on being called, complied promptly, though at the eleventh hour. Let us, therefore, imitate their obedience and diligence, and go *now* and work in the vineyard; for life, even to the youngest, is altogether uncertain, and we know not at what moment we may have arrived at the "eleventh hour" of our day.

It is far from my intention to set limits to the divine mercy, (which is unbounded and eternal,) or to say that true repentance is impossible even at the eleventh hour! but I will say that every day given up to the gratification of worldly and selfish inclinations, strengthens the barrier which separates the soul from that kingdom into which nothing that is impure or unholy can ever enter.

Even on the assumption that a long life, or a long illness, may afford you opportunity for repentance, is there any good reason to suppose that when you have lived so many years longer in the world, and become proportionally immersed in it, from the neglect of other things, that you will be more ready to *give up all* and to follow the Lord? Or that protracted illness, with accumulated sins, will be more favourable to that *change of heart*, without which you cannot be an inhabitant of the regions of love and bliss? Will evil habits be more easily shaken off the longer they are indulged? Or will the dissolution of the material body, remove the selfishness, the envy, the pride of the *heart*? But even if you should really be brought to repentance, to the abandonment of evil, and the love of good, is it probable that you will attain to so high a degree of happiness, by turning to the Lord when the world is turned from you, as you would by a life freely offered and faithfully devoted to his service?

“Repent ye, therefore, and believe the glad tidings.” “Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” “Be baptized with the baptism of repentance, confessing your sins.” “Wash ye, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well: seek judgment, relieve the oppressed; judge the fatherless; plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they

be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be *willing* and *obedient*, ye shall eat the good of the land: but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it." (Isaiah, i. 16—20.)

That we may be enabled, through the goodness and power of Almighty God, to fill our allotted stations, on earth, to His glory and the good of His creatures, and that when it shall be His holy will to call us to a higher state of being, we may be fitted, through his infinite love, to enter the mansions prepared for us in Heaven, is the prayer of your sincere friend,

ONE OF YOURSELVES.

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## POSTSCRIPT.

It has been my wish, in writing the preceding Letter, to avoid prescribing rules for the conduct of others, from the firm conviction, that, as "from *within*, out of the *heart*, proceed all evils;" when this, through the influence of the Holy Spirit, is "kept with all diligence," the "issues of life" cannot but be consistent with the law of holiness. There is, however, one subject on which I can speak from my own experience; and as it appears to me to be one of considerable importance, I take the opportunity afforded me by this vacant space, to subjoin a few remarks on *theatrical entertainments*, having reason to know that the theatres are

not without their advocates and supporters amongst the young men of the Society of Friends.

On the question whether there be any thing intrinsically bad in dramatic representations, I will not here attempt to argue. It is for us to consider, whether *the theatres*, in their *present* organization, have a beneficial or prejudicial effect upon society, and, consequently, whether we are justified or not, in giving them our support. I think no candid person will deny that the mischiefs produced by, or connected with, these establishments, immeasurably preponderate over any good they may be supposed to effect. It may be objected, that the evils resulting from our public theatres, are no argument against dramatic performances; but they are the very strongest argument against our *attending the theatres*; for he who really believes such entertainments to be useful, and supports them on this account, ought to be especially anxious to withhold his countenance, wherever they are abused; and he certainly cannot be justified in encouraging them while the abuses remain uncorrected.

The characters of many (if not most) of the persons connected with the stage; the nature of the performances themselves, few of which are free from gross and disgusting passages, and the deplorable vices fostered by the theatres, are but too notorious; and it is worth our consideration, whether these evils, though they may be justly called *abuses* of the drama, are not the *inseparable attendants* of places, which, from their very nature,

cannot fail of being the resort of the gay, the dissipated, the sensual, the abandoned. If such be the case, can we be justified in countenancing institutions *so liable* to abuse, for the sake of a very doubtful advantage?

But setting aside the pernicious effects of theatrical establishments upon the public morals, and the many minor objections which might be urged against resorting to such places of amusement,—such as the domestic and personal inconveniences occasioned by the lateness of the performances; the great expense of money, which might be so much better employed, and the *equivocations, deceit, and disagreements*, so frequently resulting from the practice in question; and setting aside the consideration of whether the members of an association for mutual benefit (be it a religious society or not) can honourably violate *its discipline*, while they enjoy its advantages and protection, I would earnestly beg of those, who, like myself, may have been in the habit of indulging occasionally in such amusements, to consider seriously and *candidly*, whether they have been rendered really happier thereby; whether they have felt the Divine presence and benediction while so engaged; whether they have *ever* enjoyed that holy communion with their heavenly Father, and that trust in his parental care, which enabled them to “fear no evil,”—that reliance on his mercy and goodness, in which they could, then and there, render their accounts with joy? These are considerations of grave importance, and

it becomes not a rational and immortal being to set them aside. For myself, I must confess, that, although, in unmerited mercy, I have been preserved from the gross vices into which so many are led by the theatres, and the circumstances connected with them, yet I *never* could feel, amidst the splendour and gaiety of the scene around, that God *was there*. I never could return home with the consciousness that my time had been *well spent* ;—I never could retire to my room and *read the Bible* with a sense of its sanctity ; I never could feel the influence of that Spirit which is *pure* and *holy*. Oh ! how different from the pleasures of dissipation, are the joys derived from the society of those in whom we can see and feel the spirit of the Redeemer ! How different the high and noble delights of charity and science ! of tracing the hand of infinite goodness, wisdom and power, in the beautiful forms which everywhere surround us, and the countless blessings we all may enjoy !

*London, 13th 4th month, 1840.*

THE END.

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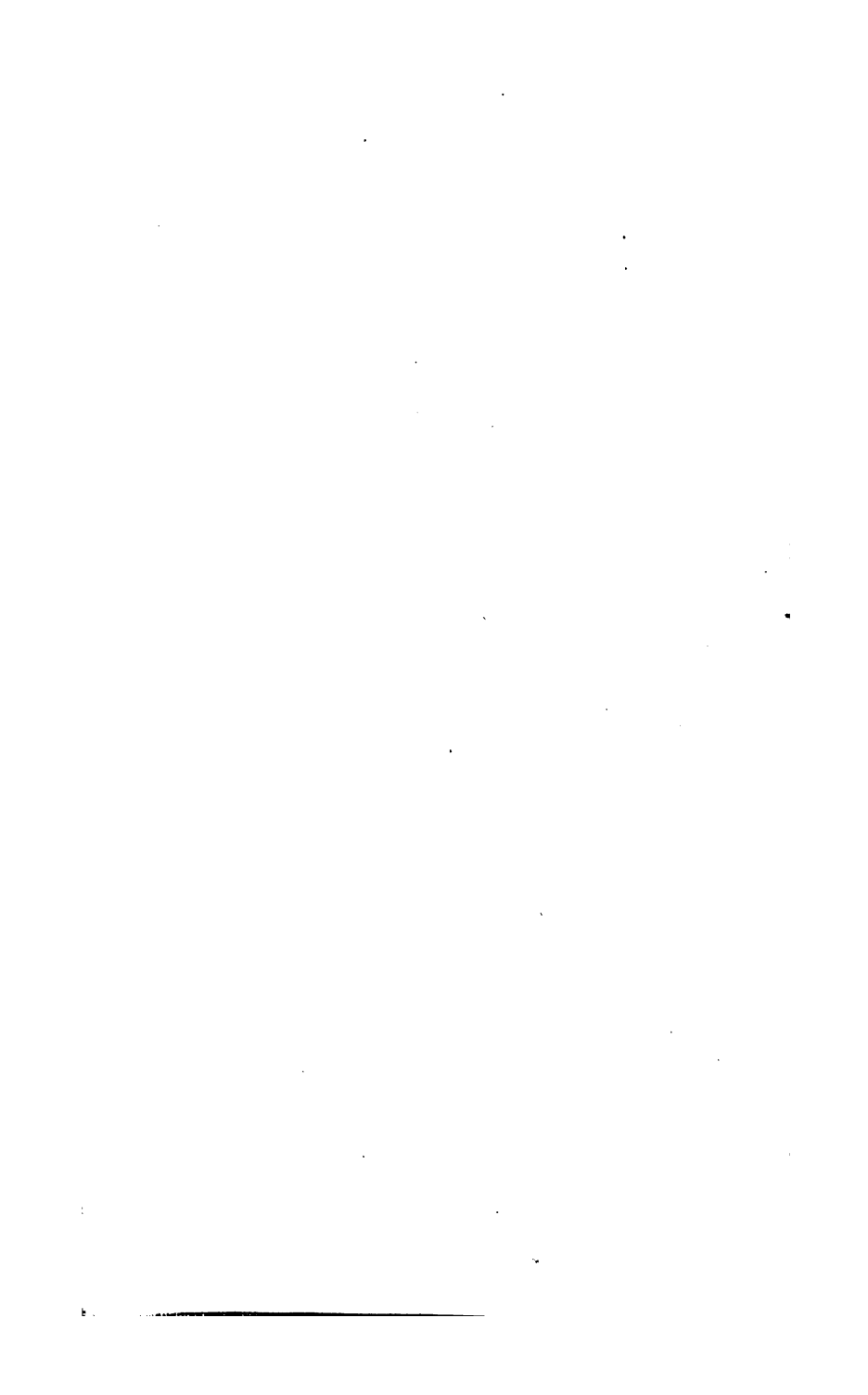


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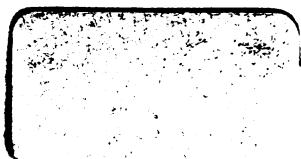
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